



# *City of Burlington*

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**Date:** February 12, 2008

**To:** Chairman Scott Gunderson and Members of the Natural Resources Committee

**From:** Claude Lois, - City of Burlington Mayor

**Re: Burlington Veterans Memorial Building Exemption – Assembly Bill 782**

Chairman Gunderson and Members of the Natural Resources Committee, my name is Claude Lois and I serve as the Mayor of the City of Burlington. I first want to thank you and Representative Samantha Kerkman for your consideration of this bill. In order to fully understand this issue, I must first provide you some historical context.

Back in 1959 the three Veterans groups in the City of Burlington, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Disabled American Veterans, pulled together with a concept of creating a living memorial to the Burlington area Veterans, and a permanent community center that Burlington could be proud of. As a result, in the name of community service, the entire city pulled together to fund and construct a wonderful facility on the banks of the White River in downtown Burlington. The building opened in 1962 and since that time, countless community events, weddings and receptions have been held at the facility.

Unfortunately, time has taken its toll on the building, and it is no longer the building of choice to host events, and it is time to refurbish it to its previous glory. As a result, the community of Burlington has again come together and is in the process of raising more than \$4 million to refurbish and expand the building. Including meeting all local codes, the refurbishment and addition will bring the building into compliance with current Americans with Disabilities Act standards. More than half of the funds have been raised, and we are now ready to begin construction. The new design remodels the existing building and adds 8900 square feet to the main floor, while creating a parking structure located underneath the addition, allowing access to the existing lower level. The current design meets all of the City of Burlington's zoning regulations and code requirements.

Unfortunately, a technical calculation as interpreted by the Department of Natural Resources is not allowing us to move forward on this project. Currently, the Veterans Memorial Building is not located in the designated 100-year floodplain as designated by the 1982 Federal Emergency Management Agency, Flood Insurance Rate Map. This map is the most current edition of the designated floodplain, as determined by FEMA. Additionally, the building is not in the floodplain according to the City of Burlington's officially adopted floodplain zoning map of 1984. This map was produced by the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, based upon FEMA's 1977 study

and officially adopted by the Burlington Common Council. However, according to the Department of Natural Resources officials, detailed engineering calculations based upon more detailed study of the site, completed by the engineering firm working with the community on this project, place the existing building and any proposed addition in the 100-year floodplain. It should be noted that the DNR is basing this conclusion upon flood profiles completed in the 1977 study. Based upon this interpretation, the DNR is not allowing us to move forward, as they contend that the refurbished and expanded structure would violate provisions of state statute N.R. 116.

I think that it is very important to point out that the current structure has existed since 1962, and has never been subject to any flooding issues of any kind. Additionally, if this project does not move forward, the existing building is as likely to flood as it was on the day it was built in 1962. However, if the project is allowed to move forward the refurbished building and addition will be flood-proofed to Federal Emergency Management Association standards and no portion of the addition will be located in the designated floodplain. The bottom line is the refurbished and expanded building will be less likely to flood, than the current building as it stands today. It is for this reason that we are seeking your assistance.

Thank you all very much for your time today and your consideration of this bill. On behalf of the Burlington area Veterans and the entire Burlington community, I respectfully request that you approve this exemption and allow us to move forward on this important community project.

**Contact Information:**

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